Bob Hampton

By RANDALL PARCISH, Author of "When Wilderness Was King,"
"My Lady of the North," "Historic Illinois," Etc.

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(Continued From Last Issue.)

As he worked he thought rapidity. He comprehended the extreme desperation of their present situation. While the revolver blow might possibly restore Murphy to a degree of sanity, it was far more probable that he would awaken violent. Yet he could not deliberately leave this man to meet a fate of horror in the wilderness. That which would have been quickly decided had he been alone became a most serious problem when considered in connection with the insane, helpless scout. Then, there were the dispatches! They must be of vital importance to have required the sending of Murphy forth on so dangerous a ride; other lives, ay, the result of the entire campaign might depend upon their early delivery. Hampton had been a soldier, the spirit of the service was still with him, and that thought brought him to fixal decision. Unless they were halted by Sioux bullets, they would push on toward the Big Horn and Custer should have the

He knelt down beside Murphy, unbuckled the leather dispatch bag, and rebuckled it across his own shoulder. Then he set to work to revive the prostrate man. The eyes, when opened, stared up at him, wild and glaring: the ugly face bore the expression of abject fear. The man was no longer violent; he had become a child, frightened at the dark.

Securely strapping Murphy to his saddle and packing all their remaining store of provisions upon one horse, leaving the other to follow or remain behind as it pleased, he advanced directly into the hills, steering by aid of the stars, his left hand ever on Murphy's bridle rein, his low voice of expostulation seeking to calm the other's wild fancies and to curb his violent speech.

At dawn they were in a narrow gorge among the hills, a dark and gloomy hole, yet a peculiarly safe spot in which to hide, having steep, rocky.

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ledges on either side, with sufficient grass for the horses. Leaving Marphy bound, Hampton clambered up the front of the rock to where he was able to look out. All was silent and his heart sank as he surveyed the brown sterile hills stretching to the horizon, having merely narrow gulches of rock and sand between, the sheer nakedness of the picture unrelieved by green shrub or any living thing. Then, almost despairing, he slid back, stretched himself out amid the soft grass, and sank into the slumber of exhaustion, his conscious memory the incoherent babbling of his insane

companion.

He awoke shortly after noon, feeling refreshed and renewed in both body and mind. Murphy was sleeping when he first turned to look at him, but he awoke in season to be fed, and accepted the proffered food with all the apparent delight of a child. While he rested, their remaining pack-animal had strayed, and Hampton was compelled to go on with only the two horses, strapping the depleted store of provisions behind his own saddle. Then he carefully hoisted Murphy into place and bound his feet beneath the animal's belly. Then he resumed the journey down one of those sandstrewn depressions pointing toward the Rosebud, pressing the refreshed ponies into a canter, confident now that their greatest measure of safety lay in audacity.

It was already becoming dusk when they swept down into a little nest of green trees and grass. It appeared so suddenly and was such an unexpected oasis amid that surrounding wilderness, that Hampton gave vent to a sudden exclamation of delight. But that was all. Instantly he perceived numerous dark forms leaping from out the shrubbery, and he wheeled his horses to the left, lashing them into a rapid run. It was all over in a moment-a sputtering of rifles, a wild medley of cries, a glimpse of savage figures, and the two were tearing down the rocks, the din of pursuit away behind them. The band were evidently all on foot, yet Hampton continued to press his mount at a swift pace, taking turn after turn about the sharp hills, confident that the hard earth would leave no trace of their

Then suddenly the horse he rode sank like a log, but his tight grip upon the rein of the other landed him on his feet. A stray Sioux bullet had found its mark, but the gallant animal had struggled on until it dropped lifeless; and the brave man it had borne so long and so well bent down and stroked tenderly the unconscious head. Then he shifted the provisions to the back of the other horse, grasped the loose rein once more in his left hand, and started forward on foot.

CHAPTER XXXI.

On the Little Big Horn. N troop, guarding, much to their emphatically expressed disgust, the more slowly moving pack-train, were following Custer's advancing column of horsemen down the right bank of the Little Big Horn. The troopers, carbines at knee, sitting erect in their saddles, their faces browned by the hot winds of the plains, were riding steadily northward. Beside them, mounted upon a rangy chestnut, Brant kept his watchful eyes on those scattered flankers dotting the summit of the near-by bluff. Suddenly one of these waved his hand eagerly, and the lieutenant went dashing up the sharp ascent.

"What is it, now, Lane?"

"Somethin' movin' out yonder, sir," and the trooper pointed into the southeast. "They're down in a coulee now, I reckon; but will be up on a ridge agin in a minute. I got sight of 'em twice afore I waved."

The officer gazed earnestly in the direction indicated, and was almost immediately rewarded by the glimpse of some indistinct, dark figures dimly 10-day Coach Tickets \$16.60 showing against the lighter back-

"White men," he announced, short-..... 31.00 ly. "Come with me."

At a brisk trot they rode out, the trooper lagging a pace to the rear, the watchful eyes of both men sweeping suspiciously across the prairie. The two parties met suddenly upon the summit of a sharp ridge and Brant drew in his horse with an exclamation of astonishment. It was a pathetic spectacle he stared at-a horse scarcely able to stagger forward; on his back, ILLINOIS CENTRAL R. R. with feet strapped securely beneath and hands bound to the high pommel, the lips grinning ferociously, perched a misshapen creature clothed as a man. Beside these, hatless, his shoes barely holding together, a man of slender figure and sunburnt face held the bridle-rein. An instant they gazed at each other, the young officer's eyes filled with sympathetic horror, the other staring apathetically at his res-

"My God! Can this be you, Hampton? What does it mean? Why are you here?"

Hampton, leaning against the trembling horse to keep erect, slowly lifted his hand in a semblance of military salute. "Dispatches from Cheyenne. This is Murphy-went crazy out yon-

der. For God's sake-water, food!" "Your canteen, Lane!" exclaimed Brant. "Now hold this cup," and he dashed into it a liberal supply of brandy from a pocket-flask. "Drink

that all down, Hampton." The man did mechanically as he was ordered, his hand never relaxing its grasp of the rein. Then a gleam of reawakened intelligence appeared in his eyes; he glanced up into the leering countenance of Murphy, and then back at those others. "Give me

another for him." Brant handed to him the filled cup, noting as he did so the strange steadiness of the hand which accepted it. Hampton lifted the tin to the figure in

'every drop!

ed to shrink in terror, and drank wished I had, but you see, I never swiftly. "We can make the rest of the way

now," Hampton announced, quietly.

"Lord, but this has been a trip!" Lane dismounted at Brant's order and assisted Hampton to climb into the vacated saddle. Then the trooper grasped the rein of Murphy's horse, trouble I've had in getting them here. and the little party started toward where the pack-train was hidden in the valley.

"Is Custer here?" said Hampton. "No; that is, not with my party. We are guarding the pack-train. The oth- before long. So I want to leave these ers are ahead, and Custer, with five troops, has moved to the right. He is somewhere among those ridges they are safe; if I don't come, then I back of the bluff."

The man turned and looked where the officer pointed, shading his eyes | girl. You will do that, won't you?"

with his hand. "Can you give me a fresh horse, a



"That Man Could Tell, But He Has Gone Mad."

bite to eat, and a cup of coffee, down there?" he asked, anxiously. see I've got to go on."

"Go on? Good God! man, do you realize what you are saying? Why, you can hardly sit the saddle! You carry dispatches, you say? Well, there are plenty of good men in my troop who will volunteer to take them

on. You need rest." "Not much," said Hampton. "I'm fit enough, or shall be as soon as I get food. Good Lord, boy, I am not done up yet, by a long way! It's the cursed loneliness out yonder," he swept his hand toward the horizon, "and the having to care for him that has broken my heart. He went that way clear back on the Powder, and it's been a fight between us ever since. I'll be all right now if you lads will only look after him. This is going to reach Custer, and I'll take it!" He flung back his ragged coat, his hand on the dispatch-bag. "I've earned the right."

Brant reached forth his hand cordially. "That's true; you have. What's more, if you're able to make the trip, that big red beard that I failed to recthere is no one here who will attempt ognize him. But their actions aroused to stop you. But now tell me how this my suspicions, and I went after them thing happened. I want to know the story before we get in."

For a moment Hampton remained silent, his thoughtful gaze on the nearby videttes, his hands leaning heavily upon the saddle pommel. Perhaps he did not remember clearly; possibly he could not instantly decide just how much of that story to tell. Brant suspected this last to be his difficulty. and he spoke impulsively.

"Hampton, there has been trouble and misunderstanding between us, but that's all past and gone now. I sincerely believe in your purpose of right, and I ask you to trust me. Either of us would give his life if need were, to be of real service to a little girl back yonder in the hills. I don't know what you are to her; I don't ask. I know she has every confidence in you, and that is enough. Now, I want to do what is right with both of you, and if you have a word to say to me regarding this matter, I'll treat it confidentially. This trip with Murphy has some bearing upon Naida Gillis, has it not?"

"Will you tell me the story?" him long and searchingly. "Brant, do you love that girl?"

Just as unwaveringly the blue eyes returned the look. "I do. I have asked her to become my wife." "And her answer?"

"She said no; that a dead man was between us."

"Is that all you know?" The younger man bent his head, his face grave and perplexed. "Practical-

ly all. Hampton wet his dry lips with his tongue, his breath quickening.

"And in that she was right," he said at last, his eyes lowered to the ground. "I will tell you why. It was the father of Naida Gillis who was convicted of the murder of Maj. Brant."

"Oh, my father? Is she Capt. Nolan's daughter? But you say 'convicted.' Was there ever any doubt? Do you question his being guilty?"

Hampton pointed in silence to the hideous creature behind them. "That man could tell, but he has gone mad." Brant endeavored to speak, but the

words would not come; his brain seemed paralyzed. Hampton held himself under better control. "I have confidence, Lieut. Brant, in

your honesty," he began, gravely, "and greatly frightened at your presence I believe you will strive to do what- and knowledge as at mine. Besides, ever is best for her, if anything should you have fully as much at stake as happen to me out yonder. But for the anyone, for in no other way can the possibility of my being knocked out, I existing barrier between Naida and wouldn't talk about this, not even to yourself be broken down." you. The affair is a long way from being straightened out so as to make fit for any service, the impatient a pleasant story, but I'll give you all Hampton was quickly supplied with you actually require to know in order the necessary ford and clothing, while to make it clear to her, provided I Murphy, grown pently abusive, was shouldn't come back. You see, she strapped on a litter between two doesn't know very much more than mules, a guard on either side. Brant

"Drink it," he commanded, curtly, tell to keep her from getting too closely entangled with you. Maybe I ought For an instant the maniac glared to have given her the full story before back at him sullenly; then he appear- I started on this trip. I've since dreamed it was going to end here, on the Big Horn; besides, I didn't have the nerve.

"You see, Brant, I feel that I simply have to carry these dispatches through. I have a pride in giving them to Custer myself, because of the But perhaps I may not come back, and in that case there wouldn't be anyone living to tell her the truth. It seems to me that there is going to be a big fight somewhere in these hills private papers with you until I come back. It will relieve my mind to know want you to open them and do whatever you decide is best for the little

He handed over a long manila envelope securely sealed, and the younger man accepted it, noticing that it was unaddressed before depositing it safely in an inner pocket of his fatigue jacket.

"Certainly, Hampton," he said. "Is that all?"

"All except what I am going to tell you now regarding Murphy. There is no use my attempting to explain exactly how I chanced to find out all these things, for they came to me little by little during several years. I knew Nolan, and I knew your father, and I had reason to doubt the guilt of the captain, in spite of the verdict of the jury that condemned him. In fact, I knew at the time, although it was not in my power to prove it, that the two principal witnesses against Nolan lied. I thought I could guess why, but we drifted apart, and finally I lost all track of every one connected with the affair. Then I happened to pick up that girl down in the canyon beyond the Bear Water, and pulled her out alive just because she chanced to be of that sex, and I couldn't stand to see her fall into Indian clutches. I didn't feel any special interest in her at the time, supposing she belonged to Old Gillis, but she somehow grew on me -she's that kind, you know; and when I discovered, purely by accident, that she was Capt. Nolan's girl, but that it all had been kept from her, I just naturally made up my mind I'd dig out the truth if I possibly could, for her sake. The fact is, I began to think a lot about her-not the way you do, you understand; I'm getting too old for that, and have known too much about women,-but maybe somewhat as a father might feel. Anyhow,

ashamed of her own name if ever she found out what it was. "About that time I fell foul of Murphy and Slavin there in Glencaid. I never got my eyes on Murphy, you know, and Slavin was so changed by good and hard. I wanted to find out what they knew, and why those lies were told on Nolan at the trial. I had an idea they could tell me. So, for a starter I tackled Slavin, supposing we were alone, and I was pumping the facts out of him successfully by holding a gun under his nose, and occasionally jogging his memory, when this fellow Murphy got excited, and chasseed into the game, but happened to nip his partner instead of me. In the course of our little scuffle I

wanted to give her a chance, a

square deal, so that she wouldn't be

chanced to catch a glimpse of the fellow's right hand, and it had a scar on the back of it that looked mighty familiar. I had seen it before, and I wanted to see it again. So, when I got out of that scrape, and the doctor had dug a stray bullet out of my anatomy, there didn't seem to be any one left for me to chase excepting Murphy, for Slavin was dead. I wasn't exactly sure he was the owner of that scar, but I had my suspicions and wanted to verify them. Having struck his trail, I reached Cheyenne just about four hours after he left there with these dispatches for the Big Horn. I caught up with the fellow on the The thoughtful gray eyes looked at south bank of the Belle Fourche, and being well aware that no threat or gun play would ever force him to confess the truth, I undertook to frighten him by trickery. I brought along some drawing-paper and drew your father's picture in phosphorus and gave him the benefit in the dark. That caught Murphy all right, and everything was coming my way. He threw up his hands and even agreed to come in here with me and tell the whole story, but the poor fellow's brain couldn't stand the strain of the scare I had given him. He went raving mad en the Powder; he jumped on me while I was asleep, and since then every mile has been a little hell. That's the whole of it to date."

They were up with the pack-train by now, and the cavalrymen gazed with interest at the new arrivals. Several among them seemed to recognize Murphy, and crowded about his horse with rough expressions of sympathy. Brant scarcely glanced at them, his grave eyes on Hampton's stern face.

"And what is it you wish me to do?" "Take care of Murphy. Don't let him remain alone for a minute. If he has any return of reason, compel him to talk. He knows you, and will be as

Insisting that now he felt perfectly you do-only what I was obliged to rode with the civilian on a sharp trot

as far as the head of the pack-train, endeavoring to the very last to persuade the wearied man to relinquish this work to another.

"Foster," he said to the sergeant in command of the advance, "did you chance to notice just what coulee Custer turned into when his column

swung to the right?" "I think it must have been the sec ond yonder, sir; where you see that bunch of trees. We was a long ways back, but I could see the boys plain enough as they come out on the bluff up there. Some of 'em waved their hats back at us. Is this man goin' after them, sir?"

"Yes, he has dispatches from Chey-

"Well he ought ter have no trouble findin' the trail. It ought ter be 'bout plain as a read back in God's country, sir, fer there were more than 200 horses, and they'd leave a good mark even on hard ground." Brant held out his hand. "I'll cer-

tainly do all in my power, Hampton, to bring this out right. You can rely on that, and I will be faithful to the little girl."

The two men clasped hands, their eyes filled with mutual confidence. Then Hampton touched spurs to his horse and galloped swiftly forward.

(Continued in Next Issue.)

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